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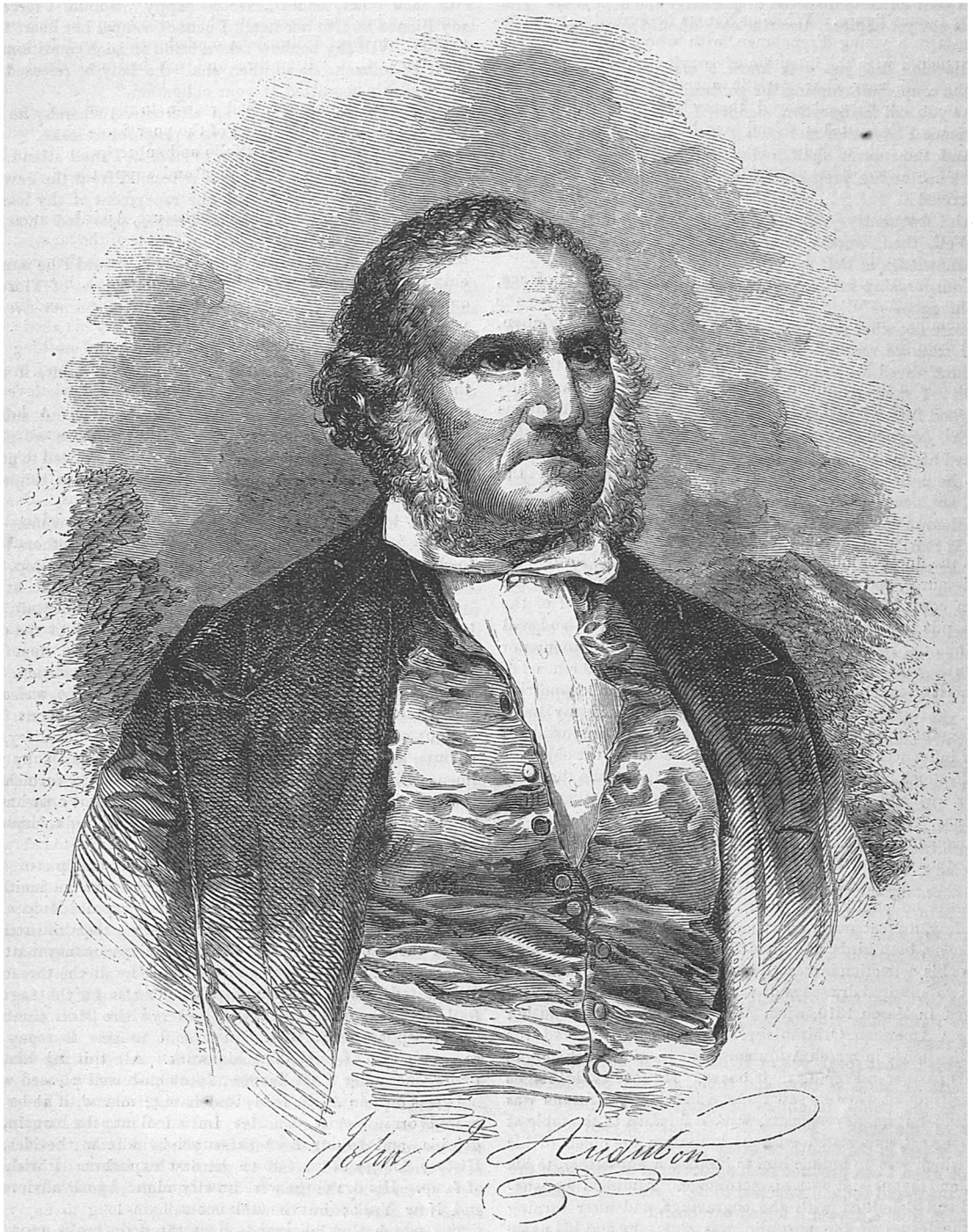
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JOHN JAMES AUDUBON, THE NATURALIST.

THE sublime scenery and luxuriant vegetation of North America not only delight the tourist, but seem to make a love of nature racy of the soil. We can hardly wonder, then, that one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest, naturalist the world has ever seen, should have arisen in the midst of this vast continent.

woods and listening to the song of the warblers. His father took him with him frequently when making excursions to distant parts of the state, and was always careful to direct his attention to rare flowers and beautiful birds, pointing out to him the variegated plumage of the latter, and speaking to him of their instincts, their mode of life, migrations and



John James Audubon was born in Louisiana about the year 1782. He was of French descent, and gave early manifestations of his taste for natural history. Birds, above all, exercised a sort of fascination over him. No amusements or pleasures that his family or friends could offer possessed half the attraction for him that was to be found in roaming in the

pleasures, and changes of colour at various periods of the year.

The child was delighted, and the tastes thus encouraged grew with his growth and strengthened with his strength. He has recounted in glowing terms the delightful impressions which these rambles of his infancy made upon him. The

desire to preserve the beautiful appearances thus presented to him, which from their very nature were fleeting and evanescent, was early awakened, and led him to apply himself to learn drawing. This was at first but a boyish fancy, but it soon became a passion. Though many of his sketches were of course at first little better than caricatures, the very imperfections of the copy led him to admire the original the more, and encouraged him to persevere in his efforts. When he was fifteen years of age he was sent to Paris to complete his education; and while there he received lessons during two years from the celebrated David, commencing with the study of the human figure. While at Nantes he formed an acquaintance with a young Frenchman, with whom he entered into partnership, with the intention of carrying on business in this country. A very characteristic anecdote is related of the way in which they employed themselves previously to their departure. Whilst his friend was busy in filing accounts, making out bills of lading, invoices, &c., Audubon occupied himself in cleaning his gun, and providing a plentiful supply of paper and crayons. It may be readily imagined that where there was so little community of sentiment, a community of property and pursuits could not last long; so that the partnership was soon dissolved.

Upon his return to America he was eighteen years of age, and his father gave him a farm near Philadelphia, where the Perkioming Creek falls into the Schuylkil. Here Audubon, freed from the irksome cares of the counting-house, gave himself up entirely to his favourite employment—roaming through the woods in the neighbourhood and the vast plains and hills crowned with eternal verdure, which offered multitudinous subjects for his pencil. His excursions, he tells us, invariably commenced at dawn; and to return in the evening wet with dew, and carrying a feathered prize, formed one of the sweetest pleasures of his life.

It might be readily supposed that one who sought happiness only in the pathless woods, and thought the songs of the wild birds the finest of music, could have but little taste for domestic pleasures, and but little inclination to tangle himself in the silken cords of love. And yet here was another proof of the thousands that have appeared since the world began, and will continue to present themselves till it ends, that no pursuits or pleasures, toils, or ambition, or triumphs, can make the heart of man cast off its allegiance to the gentler sex. Audubon married early. "Nature," says he, "which had inclined my heart towards the birds and flowers, had not rendered it insensible to softer influences." It is enough for me to add that the object of my affections has now for a good while past given me the name of her husband." This, however, is the only allusion to his marriage.

Immediately after his marriage he went to live at Louisville, in Kentucky, below the rapids of the Ohio. He remained here two years, occupied in his favourite studies. He sketched all the birds he could meet with, and took notes. His fame spreading, a great many sportsmen in the neighbourhood shot specimens, both birds and quadrupeds, and sent them to him, so that his collection increased daily; and he had at last more than two hundred drawings of various animals. He was thus engaged in March 1810, when Wilson, the celebrated author of the "American Ornithology," one morning entered the counting-house in which Audubon spent his time in sketching and his partner in keeping their books. He gave evident signs of astonishment when he saw the way in which the former was engaged; but he, nevertheless, walked forward to the table at which he sat, and stated without hesitation the object of his visit, which was to induce him to become a subscriber to his work, and favour him with his patronage. Audubon was surprised and delighted with the engravings, and after turning over the leaves of the portfolio, was about to add his name to the list, when his partner said abruptly—"Mais, mon cher Audubon, qui vous pousse à souscrire? Vos dessins sont meilleurs que ceux-là, et vous devez mieux connaître que ce quidam les mœurs et l'histoire des oiseaux d'Amérique."—"My dear Audubon, what induces you to subscribe? Your drawings are better than those, and you surely know more about the

habits and history of the American birds than this fellow." Whether Wilson understood French or not, is not known; but he evidently saw what was meant, for he instantly lost his cheerfulness, and became silent and reserved. Audubon, however, did all he could to soothe him. He lent him some of his drawings, and went for a day's shooting with him in the neighbourhood. Wilson lodged in the house, a part of which was occupied by Audubon and his family, and every evening he was heard playing Scotch airs on his flute alone in his room. The American was touched by his lonely situation, introduced him to his wife and many of his friends, and gave him a list of American birds written out with his own hand; but all was not sufficient to heal Wilson's wounded pride: and he states in his diary, that "literature and art had no friend in the place."

Audubon, years after, had reason to regret, and doubtless did regret, his cool reception of the poor Scotchman, when he himself was wandering, portfolio and subscription list in hand, and seeking the same patronage and support which he had then denied.

A few months after Wilson's departure, Audubon moved farther up the Ohio, nearer to the wild forests of the far west. He fixed his residence at Henderson, a village which then contained only six or eight houses. One of them, which, however, was only a very small log-hut, was luckily empty; and in this, with his young wife and infant son, he took up his abode. All around was a dense forest, no market near, and nothing to be had for money; but the neighbours were kind, and brought them plenty of flour and smoked hams, and did whatever else was in their power to make them comfortable. A happier couple than he and his wife at this time never existed—no care or misgiving ever troubled them. They roamed together in the woods, he with his gun on his shoulder, and often leading his child by the hand, or carrying him in his arms. Business was now totally neglected, and the livelong day passed in shooting and fishing. He made a retreat on the top of his house for the swallows and martins, to serve them at the period of immigration.

He had now for nearly twenty years submitted impatiently to the drudgeries of commerce, but he was unable any longer to control his inclination; and he therefore, in spite of the prayers and entreaties of his family and friends, resolved on bidding adieu for a season to the delights of home, and completely abandoning himself to a nomad life in the forests. He set out with a valise on his back, containing his diary, his colours, and his brushes and pencils, and a small supply of linen, which he made use of when required to furbish his fowling-piece, and plunged into the prairies. Not only has he painted and described the numerous species of birds which inhabit the vast continent which extends from Mexico to Labrador, but in five thick volumes he has given lively and picturesque sketches of the strange characters and the strange incidents which he encountered on the way, and graphic descriptions of the sublime scenery which everywhere astonishes and delights the tourist in the far west. He slept by night at the foot of a tree, killed game and cooked it for his subsistence, and floated down hundreds of miles along mighty rivers in a frail canoe, sketching as he went—everywhere braving fatigue and disappointment with dauntless courage. But he had as yet no idea of publishing his work. All this labour was undergone under the influence of pure enthusiasm.

It was only in April, 1824, that having met with the celebrated ornithologist, Charles Lucien Bonaparte, at Philadelphia, and having been presented by him to the Natural History Society of that town, he first experienced the desire of fame. His drawings were greatly admired in Philadelphia and New York; but he did not remain long to enjoy the praise which they elicited. He started thence to visit the great lakes of the north; and it was in the silence and desolation of the vast forests on their shores that he first thought of giving the results of his labours to the world. "Happy days! happy nights!" he exclaims in his journal, when, revelling in dreams of future glory by the light of his lonely watch-fire, he ran through his collection, asking himself

proudly, how should one man, without assistance, without reputation, without literary or scientific connexions, be able to carry out a plan so vast and extensive, to publish immense drawings, in which not only each bird should be reproduced as large as life, but every part of the bird,—beak, feet, legs, talons, all laid down by the aid of the compass with mathematical accuracy? Flowers, plants, insects, reptiles, fishes, had all been faithfully copied from nature in every particular. Difference in form or size had led him in the beginning to divide his collection into three classes; but he now made a further division into books of five plates each, and advancing still farther westward, determined to leave nothing wanting to the success of his work, which time, perseverance, and labour could accomplish.

Eighteen months afterwards he returned to his family, who were now in Louisiana; and after having explored the forests in that neighbourhood, and in vain endeavoured to procure subscribers in the chief towns of the Union, or induce the American artists to undertake the engraving of his designs, he determined with a heavy heart to try his fortune in Europe. He therefore embarked for England in May, 1826.

His first impressions of England were anything but agreeable. He had numerous letters of introduction, but still considering every European far superior to the Americans in matters relating to literature and art, he looked upon himself as lost in the crowd; and he states that, as he traversed the streets of Liverpool without meeting with one friendly glance, his heart sank within him. But on presenting his letters of introduction, his prospects began to brighten. His drawings were exhibited to the public, and loudly praised in the newspapers. He was received with great favour and *éclat* in Manchester and other great towns. In Edinburgh his reception was enthusiastic. Upon going there, he put his drawings into the hands of the engraver, although he had not as yet one subscriber. On leaving the northern Athens he had obtained the names of sixty-five of its aristocracy, thus enabling him to count upon £16,000 for a work which had only just been commenced.

All now went on prosperously. After a tour through England and Scotland, he paid a visit to Paris in 1828, where he was received with open arms by the scientific world. Cuvier said "that his work was the most gigantic and most magnificent monument that had ever been erected to nature." The ensuing winter was passed in London, and in April, 1829, he returned to America to explore anew the woods of the middle and southern states. Accompanied by his wife, he left New Orleans on the 8th of January, 1830, for New York; and on the 25th of April, just a year from the time of his departure, he was again in the great metropolis. Before the close of 1830, he had issued his first volume, containing one hundred plates, representing ninety-nine species of birds, every figure of the size and colours of life. The applause with which it was received was enthusiastic and universal. The kings of England and France had placed their names at the head of his subscription list; he was made a fellow of the Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh,—a member of the Natural History Society of Paris, and other celebrated institutions.

On the 1st of August, 1831, Audubon arrived once more in New York, and having passed a few days with his friends there and in Philadelphia, proceeded to Washington, where the president and other principal officers of the government gave him letters of assistance and protection to be used all along the coast and inland frontiers where there were collectors of revenue or military or naval forces. He had previously received similar letters from the king's ministers to the authorities of the British colonies.

Proceeding at length upon his mission, he explored the forests of Maine and New Brunswick, and the shores of the Bay of Fundy, and chartering a vessel at Eastport, sailed for the gulf of St. Lawrence, the Magdalen Islands, and the coast of Labrador. Returning as the cold season approached, he visited Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, and, rejoining his family, proceeded to Charleston, where he spent the winter;

and in the spring, after nearly three years' travel and research, sailed a third time for England.

The second volume of "The Birds of America" was finished in 1834, and in December of that year he published in Edinburgh the second volume of the "Ornithological Biography." Soon after, while he was in London, a nobleman called upon him, with his family, and on examining some of his original drawings, and being told that it would still require eight years to complete the work, subscribed for it, saying, "I may not see it finished, but my children will." The words made a deep impression on Audubon. "The solemnity of his manner I could not forget for several days," he writes in the introduction to his third volume; "I often thought that neither might I see the work completed, but at length exclaimed, 'My sons may;' and now that another volume, both of my illustrations and of my biographies, is finished, my trust in Providence is augmented, and I cannot but hope that myself and my family together may be permitted to see the completion of my labours." When this was written, ten years had elapsed since the publication of his first plate. In the next three years, among other excursions, he made one to the western coast of the Floridas, and to Texas, in a vessel placed at his disposal by government; and at the end of this time appeared the fourth and concluding volume of his engravings, and the fifth of his descriptions. The whole comprised four hundred and thirty-five plates, containing one thousand and sixty-five figures, from the bird of Washington to the humming bird, of the size of life, and a great variety of land and marine views, and floral and other productions, of different climates and seasons, all carefully drawn and coloured after nature. Well might the great naturalist felicitate himself upon the completion of his gigantic task. He had spent nearly half a century "amid the tall grass of the far-extended prairies of the west, in the solemn forests of the north, on the heights of the midland mountains, by the shores of the boundless ocean, and on the bosoms of our vast bays, lakes, and rivers, searching for things hidden since the creation of this wondrous world from all but the Indian who has roamed in the gorgeous but melancholy wilderness." And, speaking from the depth of his heart, he says, "Once more surrounded by all the members of my dear family, enjoying the countenance of numerous friends who have never deserted me, and possessing a competent share of all that can render life agreeable, I look up with gratitude to the Supreme Being, and feel that I am happy."

In 1839, having returned for the last time to his native country, and established himself with his family near the city of New York, Audubon commenced the publication of "The Birds of America," in imperial octavo volumes, of which the seventh and last was issued in the summer of 1844. The plates in this edition, reduced from his larger illustrations, were engraved and coloured in the most admissible manner by Mr. Bowen, of Philadelphia, under the direction of the author.

Audubon was too sincere a worshipper of nature to be content with inglorious repose, even after having accomplished in action more than was ever dreamed of by any other naturalist; and while the "edition for the people" of his "Birds of America" was in course of publication, he was busy amid the forests and prairies, the reedy swamps of the southern shores of America, the cliffs that protect the eastern coasts, by the currents of the Mexican Gulf, and the tide-streams of the Bay of Fundy, with his sons, Victor Gifford and John Woodhouse, making the drawings and writing the biographies of "The Quadrupeds of America," a work in no respect inferior to that on birds.

Audubon's highest claim to admiration is founded upon his drawings in natural history, in which he has exhibited a perfection never before attempted. But he has also indisputable claims to a respectable rank as a man of letters. Some of his written pictures of birds, so graceful, clearly defined, and brilliantly coloured, are scarcely inferior to the productions of his pencil. His powers of general description are also remarkable.

After his many travels, Audubon died peacefully at his residence in New York, on January 27, 1851. He had arrived at a ripe old age. Two sons survive to deplore his loss, and to prosecute the science in which the father won such fame.